

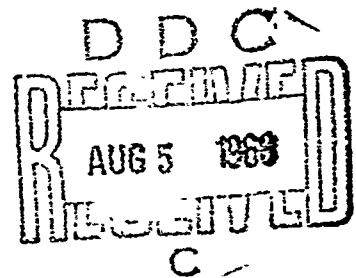
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MEMORANDUM  
RM-5688-ARPA  
JULY 1968

# THE NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY ADVISER IN LAOS: A FIRST HAND ACCOUNT

Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff

PREPARED FOR:  
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PREFACE

This study is concerned with the experience of a North Vietnamese military adviser to a Pathet Lao battalion operating in northern Laos. It is a by-product of a larger inquiry into Communism in Laos which RAND is conducting under the sponsorship of the Advanced Research Projects Agency.

Paul F. Langer is a RAND research staff member. Joseph J. Zasloff, a consultant to The RAND Corporation, is professor of political science at the University of Pittsburgh.

### SUMMARY

An insight into the North Vietnamese role in Laos is afforded by the testimony of the North Vietnamese Captain, Mai Dai Hap, a member of the Communist Lao Dong Party who served as military advisor to a Pathet Lao battalion in Nam Tha province in northern Laos from February 1964 until his defection in December 1966. The substance of the North Vietnamese captain's account is borne out by documentary evidence as well as by the testimony of Pathet Lao defectors and of other Vietnamese military who deserted their posts in Laos.

This Memorandum presents excerpts from the captain's testimony. Mai Dai Hap was one of 30 North Vietnamese who had been assigned in early 1964 to serve in Laos. On the eve of their departure, their brigade commander in his farewell address made it clear that military service in Laos, as in the south of Vietnam, was to be viewed exactly like an assignment at home. It is also interesting to note that the captain and his group were deployed to Laos through southern China. En route to their destination they encountered the first battalion of the 316th NVA Brigade, also headed for Laos. Illustrative of the active part played by the North Vietnamese in support of the Lao insurgency, Mai Dai Hap was joined on his way to Laos by the battalion commander and the executive officer of the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion, who were returning from training in Hanoi.

Captain Hap dwelled at length on the functions and responsibilities of the North Vietnamese military advisor in Laos and provided much specific information regarding

the North Vietnamese military and political-administrative support system for the Pathet Lao. This included a description of Doan (group) 959, located at Gia-Lam, close to Hanoi, which served as the mechanism through which the North Vietnamese directed their political guidance and administrative support to the Pathet Lao. The captain had visited these headquarters, which received their instructions from the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party. Purely military matters relating to the insurgency in northern Laos, however, are handled through Northwest Military Region Headquarters at Son La in North Vietnam. Representatives of these headquarters are in close touch with the North Vietnamese military advisors in Laos. Inspectors from these headquarters are sent into Laos to check on the work of their representatives.

Mai Dai Hap described in detail how he trained the personnel of the Lao battalion to which he was assigned and how he planned for and directed its operations. He also discussed the activity of the North Vietnamese political advisors in Laos.

From the full picture presented by Captain Mai Dai Hap emerges the conclusion that North Vietnamese support for the Pathet Lao forces plays a vital role in their ability to maintain the insurgency against the Royal Lao Government. Mai Dai Hap himself put it this way: "Generally speaking, everything is initiated by the North Vietnamese advisors, be it important or unimportant. If the North Vietnamese advisory machinery were to get stuck, the Pathet Lao machinery would be paralyzed."



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## I. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Laos today is in effect divided into two zones: one area under the control of the internationally recognized Royal Lao Government (RLG) and another, along the borders of the two Vietnams, under the rule of the insurgent Pathet Lao (literally, "Land of the Lao") movement.

The position of the Pathet Lao (PL) in its military and political struggle against the Royal Lao Government is stiffened by a massive presence of Vietnamese Communists, both military and civilian. A particularly interesting insight into the North Vietnamese role in Laos is afforded by the testimony of a North Vietnamese senior captain, Mai Dai Hap, a member of the Communist Lao Dong (Workers') Party who served as military adviser to a Pathet Lao battalion in northern Laos from February 1964 until his defection, in December 1966. Excerpts from Hap's account are presented in Part III of this Memorandum.

In order to place the adviser's testimony into the broader context of the military-political struggle now dividing Laos, it may be helpful to summarize the relevant facts regarding the interrelationship of the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese Communists as well as the role of the Vietnamese in Laos. The following information is taken from the authors' forthcoming study of Communism in Laos, which is based on some 200 interviews of Lao and Vietnamese defectors and other persons with relevant first-hand experience as well as on the examination of more than 270 Pathet Lao and Vietnamese documents including diaries, internal communications, textbooks, and other evidence.



Until 1945, Laos, together with Cambodia and Vietnam, formed the French colonial empire of Indochina. For decades, Vietnam, the most populous and developed part of the Indochinese peninsula, provided the sparsely populated Laos with its administrators. Together with the Chinese, the Vietnamese also dominated Laotian crafts and trade. By the end of World War II, some 50,000 Vietnamese resided in Laos, principally in the towns along the Mekong River. In August 1945, Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh movement proclaimed the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and the Viet Minh began vigorously to recruit adherents among the Vietnamese residents of Laos.

Under the stimulus of the Viet Minh example, a nationalist independence movement, the Lao Issara (Free Laos), gained strength in Laos. In the late 1940s, this movement, some of whose leaders were in exile in Thailand, had the financial support and encouragement of the Viet Minh. The Vietnamese also assisted actively -- with funds, weapons, advice, and men -- in the creation of small "resistance bases" in the mountainous regions of Laos along the Vietnamese border.

In 1949, the moderate elements among the Lao independence movement, many of whom (including the present Prime Minister of Laos, Prince Souvanna Phouma) were still in Thailand, accepted the French offer of semiautonomy within the French Union and returned to Laos. A small minority, however, led by the Lao nationalist Prince Souphanouvong, decided to carry on the struggle for complete national independence alongside the Viet Minh forces. From the merger of Souphanouvong's faction with the forces of

several small Lao guerrilla bases in eastern Laos and North Vietnam evolved the political movement known as the Pathet Lao. The mass organization for the Pathet Lao is the Neo Lao Haksat (NLHS), which means Lao Patriotic Front. This Front, in turn, is guided by the Phak Pasason Lao (Lao People's Party), a semisecret Marxist-Leninist organization of selected membership whose secretary-general is Kaysone Phomvihane. It is significant that the three most prominent leaders of these organizations have close Vietnamese ties: Souphanouvong, the chairman of the NLHS, has a Vietnamese wife; so has Nouhak, probably the No. 2 man in the movement; and Kaysone, the most powerful of the leaders, is half-Vietnamese.

Although Laos gained complete independence from France as a result of the Geneva Conference of 1954, several attempts to bring the contending forces into a national union government failed, and fighting has continued intermittently for well over a decade. The most recent effort to bring peace to Laos was undertaken at the Geneva Conference on Laos, in 1962. It resulted in a tripartite government combining the right-wing faction, the neutralists under Prince Souvanna Phouma, and the Pathet Lao with its titular leader Prince Souphanouvong. A year later, this uneasy coalition broke up, as the Pathet Lao representatives left Vientiane to rejoin their home bases in the provinces along the Vietnamese frontier, where they had continued to maintain their control. Although the tripartite national union government, led by Prince Souvanna Phouma, remained in power and all parties professed loyalty to the Laotian King in Luang Prabang, the fighting resumed and has continued to this day.

Throughout the last two decades, the Vietnamese presence in Laos has been of crucial importance in maintaining and consolidating the Pathet Lao's control over large areas of Laos. In the 1950-1954 period, the Pathet Lao movement was numerically weak and had few assets independent of the Viet Minh. Particularly important to its claim to power was the Viet Minh military offensive that plunged through northeastern, central, and southern Laos during 1953 and 1954. This campaign "liberated" the Laotian provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua and led to the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, near Vietnam's border with northern Laos. Although Communist sources insist that the conquest of the two Lao provinces was due to the Pathet Lao military effort, the Viet Minh actually provided the bulk of the forces, with the assistance of a small number of Pathet Lao. This arrangement has remained characteristic of Communist successes in Laos down to the present.

The Geneva Conference of 1954 reserved the two provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly as "regroupment" zones for the Pathet Lao, thus laying the groundwork for the buildup of their influence in eastern Laos. Between 1954 and 1959 the Viet Minh continued to aid the Pathet Lao, but their role during this period was generally low-keyed, and the bulk of the Vietnamese forces was withdrawn. Vietnamese military and political cadres, however, were left behind in the two Laotian provinces to serve as advisers and to fill certain technical posts. In addition, Viet Minh cadres provided military and political training for the Pathet Lao both in Laos and in North Vietnam.

The breakdown of negotiations for reintegration of the Pathet Lao into a national union government, in 1959, coincided with a new phase in the DRV's policy in South Vietnam. Increased support for the insurgency in Laos reflected North Vietnam's interest in securing Communist control over the southern panhandle of Laos, which served as an infiltration route to South Vietnam. Simultaneously, DRV and Pathet Lao policy in Laos became more aggressive. In a major offensive, which began in 1959, the active military role of the Vietnamese enabled the Pathet Lao to make substantial gains. When an unofficial cease-fire line was established by the Geneva Conference in 1962, the Communist forces held roughly half the territory of Laos.

Since then, the Vietnamese presence in Laos has been divided between military forces operating as separate units, and advisory and support personnel aiding the Pathet Lao. Vietnamese Communist forces estimated at about 40,000 men are now active in Laos, some 25,000 to protect the infiltration routes into South Vietnam, and 15,000 in support of Pathet Lao operations. Advisory activity and guidance in both the military and the political field -- two important aspects of the Vietnamese role in Laos -- are described in part in Senior Captain Mai Dai Hap's account. The Vietnamese conduct military and political training courses for Pathet Lao cadres, provide education to Lao technicians, primarily in schools in North Vietnam, and also furnish logistic support. All these services are supplemented and strengthened by a propagandistic and diplomatic effort for their Pathet Lao allies.

As a result of the historical relationship between the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese Communists, the Pathet Lao military and political system bears the heavy imprint of the North Vietnamese Communist pattern. The Vietnamese endow the Pathet Lao effort with a sense of cohesiveness and direction. In so doing, they stiffen Pathet Lao intransigence. Thus, Prince Souvanna Phouma contends that the movement's alliance with the DRV prolongs the military struggle in Laos, because it inhibits tendencies that he believes exist within the Pathet Lao to seek an accommodation with the Royal Lao Government through a return to the national union coalition. As mentioned above, the provisions for that short-lived union were laid down in the Geneva Agreements of 1962, which were endorsed by all major powers with interests in Laos and in peace and stability in Southeast Asia generally.

## II. THE ADVISER, MAI DAI HAP

Mai Dai Hap was born in 1930 in a village of Thanh-Hoa Province in the coastal lowlands of North Vietnam. Like the great majority of rural Vietnamese, his family engaged in rice-farming. They were slightly better off than their neighbors, being classified as "middle" farmers by Viet Minh standards. Prior to his military service, Hap had only five years of formal education. He entered school in his native district when he was seven, but had to drop out at the age of twelve when his father died and he was needed in the rice paddies to help support his widowed mother and four brothers. In 1950, when the Viet Minh was expanding its military organization in the struggle against the French, the then twenty-year-old Hap joined the Viet Minh forces. Two years later he became a member of the Lao Dong Party.

Hap's army history shows steady promotion within the infantry up to the grade of senior captain, which he was awarded in October 1966, shortly before his defection. Most of his army service prior to his assignment to Laos was in the Northwest Military Region of North Vietnam, the highland area adjacent to Laos. In the 1953 Viet Minh offensive in Laos, his unit fought in an area near Dien Bien Phu (although he was not engaged directly in the major battle at that fort in 1954). From 1953 to 1958, he served with the 159th Independent Regiment in the same region, and from August 1958 to February 1960 he attended an infantry officer school at nearby Sontay. Graduating with the rank of lieutenant,

he was assigned as commander of the 5th Company, 1st Battalion, of the 316th Brigade, which was stationed in the Dien Bien Phu sector. In December 1963, two months before his assignment to Laos, he was promoted to Captain 2nd Class.

From February 1964 until his defection in December 1966, Captain Hap served in Laos as military adviser to the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion in the Nam Tha region on the Laos-China border. During this period he only once went back to North Vietnam, leaving Laos in July 1966 for the long journey through southern China to attend a week-long meeting for North Vietnamese advisers to Pathet Lao units held at Son La, the headquarters of the Northwest Military Region in North Vietnam, which directs the North Vietnamese military operations in Laos. Before reporting for the meeting itself, he was granted home leave, which permitted him to visit his mother, his second wife, and his three children. (The children were by his first marriage. Their mother having died in 1960, he had married his second wife that same year.) He returned to Laos in October 1966.

We interviewed Mai Dai Hap in Vientiane, with the aid of an interpreter, in April and May 1967. Some ten sessions of three to four hours each produced a transcript of approximately 100 pages. At our request, Hap also supplied written answers to a set of questions and, in addition, wrote a 70-page memoir in which he related his experiences as a military adviser to a Pathet Lao battalion.

From this wealth of information we have selected a few portions that tell Hap's personal history and reveal

some of his attitudes. But our main interest has been in presenting material to show how a North Vietnamese adviser to a Pathet Lao battalion sees the problems he faces, and how he copes with them. In grouping related statements under individual topics, we have added explanatory notes wherever Mai Dai Hap's observations might confuse the reader, and we have deleted repetitious passages. In general, however, we have allowed Hap to speak for himself.

Our long conversations with Mai Dai Hap left us in no doubt about his intelligence. He was alert and articulate. Our interpreters and translators described his Vietnamese as quite literate, and his spoken Lao as exceptionally good for someone without previous language training. He was particularly competent in military analysis and, in keeping with his Party training, sensitive to the political dimensions. His good mind and 22 months of service in Laos combined to give him a sound grasp of both Vietnamese and Pathet Lao operations.

Certainly, Mai Dai Hap's attitudes must be interpreted in the light of his defection. We are satisfied, however, that the information he has given is substantially true. Our other interviews with both Pathet Lao and Vietnamese sources, as well as documentary evidence, support his account.

To preserve as much as possible of the original flavor of the story as Mai Dai Hap told it, we shall quote him directly in the pages to follow. Brief phrases and comments appear in brackets.



### III. HIS ACCOUNT

#### REASSIGNMENT

One day in December 1963, I was vacationing at Cua Ong, a coal-exporting harbor in North Vietnam. I was enjoying life, that peaceful life which reigned in our prosperous country, when suddenly I received a telegram to report to the Headquarters of the 316th Brigade in Dien Bien Phu to accept a new assignment. I confess that I was half happy and half apprehensive. We had been taught to accept responsibilities, to be ready to assume any new duties assigned to us by the Party.\* It was our task to save the country from the American invaders. The telegram led me to think that my new assignment might send me either to the South [i.e., South Vietnam] or to Laos. I was happy at the news because I felt that I had gained the confidence of the Party, but at the same time I was troubled because I knew that I would be separated from my beloved family and my beloved country. I knew that I would be facing war, and I confess that I did not like to fight or to be separated from my native land.

In January 1964, I called at Brigade Headquarters and met Lt. Col. Chu Phuong Doi, the Brigade Commander, who told me: "Comrade, procure the necessary papers and proceed to Headquarters to receive your new assignment."

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\*This refers to the North Vietnamese lao Dong (Workers') Party of which Mai Dai Hap had been a member since 1952.

Before our departure, the Brigade gave a banquet for the thirty cadres, from senior captain down, who were departing. In his address to us the Brigade Commander said:

No matter what role you play, no matter what duties you assume, whether you are assigned to the South, to Laos, or to duty in the North, always maintain and develop the prestige of our troops, particularly the prestige of our Brigade.

He then proposed a toast to our health. Our representative stood up to assure the Brigade Commander of our determination to fulfill the duties assigned to us by the Party.

We left the 316th Brigade at Dien Bien Phu in late January for leave to visit our families, our native place, our fertile land. I felt very enthusiastic about going back to the lowlands\* for a rest and a visit with my parents, my wife and children, and my close friends, from whom I had been separated for so many years. I also thought that I might be leaving these northwestern highlands forever.

I had just reached my home on February 1, when a telegram called me back again on February 5: I was to report to the Commander's Headquarters immediately to accept my assignment. The message cut short my joys and filled my family with sorrow. After my years of separation from them, my month's leave had ended after only

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\*Hap's home province, Thanh-Hoa, is in the coastal lowlands of North Vietnam. He had been serving with the 316th Brigade in the mountainous area around Dien Bien Phu, in the northwestern part of the country.

five days. I tried to comfort my family, and in the evening of the day I had received the cable, I boarded a train headed for Hanoi. Promptly on February 6, I reported for duty at Headquarters, where a major met me and gave me the Commander's order. I learned then that I was to go to Laos as a military adviser to the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion. Simultaneously I was given the status of a Battalion Commander, although I was still officially ranked as a Captain 2nd Class.

#### PREPARATION FOR SERVICE IN LAOS

The major took me in his jeep to Group 959\* at Gia-Lam [on the outskirts of Hanoi], which commanded all [political and administrative] operations in Laos. I was apprehensive about my future role of adviser to the Pathet Lao: I did not know any foreign language, and I knew that living with the Pathet Lao troops would be miserable and that my life would be in danger. I assumed that their fighting capabilities were poor, and that in case of danger they would leave me. These were the reasons that tempted me to refuse the assignment. But I confess that I did not dare speak up because I was afraid of the negative effect this refusal could have on my future.

When I arrived at Group 959 Headquarters, I met Senior Captain Tho, a cadre on permanent duty there who gave me instructions on how to prepare for my Laos

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\*For the functions and significance of Group 959, see the discussion on organization.

assignment. I was to leave behind anything that would identify me as a North Vietnamese officer, to take off all insignia, and to draw new uniforms and the equipment necessary to a cadre assigned to Laos.\* I received warm clothing and long-sleeved shirts, underwear similar to that worn by a Pathet Lao soldier, a blanket, a mosquito net, 2 pairs of shoes, 3 meters of "ni long" (nylon) waterproof raincoat material, 1 hammock, an individual first-aid kit, 1 pistol, and 50 cartridges. [I was told that] Group 959 Headquarters would be responsible for sending my monthly salary to my family. In case of sickness, my family would be entitled to free medical care in any military hospital; in case of material need, they would receive assistance from regional cooperatives; in any popular gatherings, they were entitled to occupy seats of honor. I was introduced to several company-level cadres who had been assigned as advisers to various companies of the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion.

It took three days for all the preparations. Then, we were given money and allowed a few days' rest. We received sugar, milk, cigarettes, cakes, and candies. On the evening of February 9, Group 959 organized a farewell banquet in our honor. Mr. Nguyen Van Vinh, an important member of the Party, addressed us with comforting words, and encouraged us to develop the prestige of our troops and wholeheartedly to fulfill our duties. He also told

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\*Interviews with defectors from the ranks of the Pathet Lao have corroborated the observation that North Vietnamese advisers to Pathet Lao units do not wear North Vietnamese uniforms. They dress in the same manner as the Pathet Lao military.

us about the characteristics of the Pathet Lao cadres and troops, the customs and ways of the Lao people, the international situation at the time, the actual situation of our country, and the enemy's strategy in Laos.

#### DEPLOYMENT TO LAOS VIA CHINA

On the morning of February 10, ten of us went by train from Gia-Lam to Yen-Bai, where we rested overnight. Then, in the afternoon [of February 11], we took the train from Yen-Bai to Lao-Kay (Lao Cai),<sup>\*</sup> on the Chinese border, where we arrived at 3 a.m. of February 12. There we met the 1st Battalion of the 316th NVA Brigade,<sup>\*\*</sup> also headed for Laos. With them were two Lao officers on the way back to their country after a period of training in Hanoi. They were Khamseng, the 408th Battalion Commander, and Khamphoui, his executive officer. Both knew Vietnamese.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> I was feeling much better by then, because I was meeting people who were going my way, particularly the two cadres of the battalion with whom I was to work. Their knowledge of Vietnamese was going to help me considerably in solving the problems I would soon face.

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<sup>\*</sup> Vietnamese border station on the railroad from Hanoi into China located opposite the Chinese station of Ho-k'ou.

<sup>\*\*</sup> This was a battalion of the same brigade in which Hap had served.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Because of the past association of Vietnam and Laos in French Indochina and the active role of the Vietnamese in Laos, many Lao, irrespective of political affiliation, know Vietnamese. Our interviews with Pathet Lao sources suggest that this is particularly true among the Pathet Lao, many of whom have been trained in Vietnam.

At Lao-Kay the train crossed into China. This was the first time I had set foot on the immense land of our ally. The train sped past cities and towns, rice paddies, and plants of our Chinese friends. I was filled with great joy, and determined to fulfill my duties. We were on the train all day, until 6 p.m. of February 12, when it finally stopped at Bang Khe,<sup>\*</sup> in the province of Yunnan. There we joined a regiment of the Chinese People's Liberation Army for food and rest. On the morning of February 13 we went on by truck, and drove continuously for five days, past Mong-Tu, Xi-Mao, and Muong-La (Men-la). In the evening of February 17, we arrived at Muong-Mang, only 2 km from the Lao border. We washed up, did our laundry, and rested for the night. The next morning, all cadres from company level up gathered at a meeting at which a cadre from the Chinese regiment gave us an intelligence report<sup>\*\*</sup> on the enemy's situation [across the border] in the Muong Sing<sup>\*\*\*</sup> [region of Laos].

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<sup>\*</sup> Chinese place names will be rendered here as they appear in the Vietnamese original.

<sup>\*\*</sup> This is Mai Dai Hap's only reference to a briefing on the situation in Laos by a Chinese Communist cadre, although he took altogether three journeys through China on his way to or from Laos during the years he served there as an adviser. While in Laos, Hap stated, he had no contact with Chinese Communist military or civilian personnel, nor did he observe the presence of such personnel in that country.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Muong Sing is a major Lao town in the Nam Tha region, only a few miles from the Chinese border. Roads and trails leading toward China, Burma, and Thailand converge at Muong Sing, making it an important transportation center for the northern part of the country.

[Thereafter Captain Hap and his group crossed the border from China into Laos to report to their duty post with the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion, which operated throughout northern Nam Tha, along the borders of Communist China]

#### FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ADVISER

[Captain Mai Dai Hap provided much information regarding the organization of the North Vietnamese military and political-administrative support system for the Pathet Lao. In his capacity of military adviser to a Pathet Lao battalion he had operated within the framework of this organization, and much of what he described, therefore, was based on his own experience. To aid the reader's understanding of Hap's place in the organizational structure, we shall summarize briefly the relevant portions of his account.

Group (Doan) 959, located at Gia-Lam (some 4 km from Hanoi), serves as the mechanism through which the North Vietnamese direct their political guidance and administrative support to the Pathet Lao. Its headquarters, which Mai Dai Hap visited in 1964, was then staffed by some fifty persons, headed by a member of the Committee of National Defense in the DRV Ministry of Defense. Group 959 receives its instructions from the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party and from the Commander-in-Chief of the North Vietnamese military forces. It maintains a forward command post in Sam Neua Province, where the Pathet Lao have their central headquarters. Very likely, this North Vietnamese forward command in Laos performs an advisory mission with the Central Committee of the Lao People's Party.

Purely military matters, however, are handled through a separate North Vietnamese hierarchy. Northwest Military Region Headquarters at Son La in North Vietnam is responsible for coordinating the Vietnamese military effort for all of northern Laos. At least once a month, its representatives on the various levels of the Pathet Lao military hierarchy report to this headquarters on the military situation in their province. Every three months, they send a broader summary of the general situation. In unusual circumstances, they may ignore this schedule and

consult headquarters immediately for advice or action. Northwest Military Region Headquarters also sends officers into Laos to inspect the work of its representatives.

A Vietnamese advisory mission is generally represented at the higher levels of the Pathet Lao civilian and military organization. As already mentioned, Group 959 maintains a political-advisory mission at Pathet Lao Central Headquarters in Sam Neua. Until 1965, when the next-lower echelon, the Military Region, was eliminated in northern Laos in an administrative reorganization, Vietnamese advisers were represented there also.

On the civilian side, permanent advisory posts do not extend below the province. At this level, the advisory effort is composed of two elements: political advisers, who operate primarily through the Lao People's Party, and administrative advisers, who work in such fields as communications, economic affairs, and police. On the military side, each province has its military advisory mission, whose chief is located at the Pathet Lao province headquarters and is responsible both for commanding the Vietnamese military advisers assigned to Pathet Lao units within the province and for advising the Lao provincial authorities on military matters. Normally, each Pathet Lao battalion is assigned one military and one political adviser. (Mai Dai Hap was the military adviser for the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion, in Nam Tha Province.) Formerly, organized battalions such as the 408th also had advisers at the company level, but, as Hap pointed out, they were discontinued in 1966. However, advisers to Pathet Lao 'independent' (Ekalat) companies (that is, companies operating on the district level, which are not part of an organized battalion) have been continued.

The coordination of the North Vietnamese political and military effort at the province level is carried out through a committee of three political cadres and three military officers, who meet from time to time in a "command committee."]

#### The Adviser's Mission

All North Vietnamese cadres and advisers, when helping the Pathet Lao, must act as if those duties were



their own. For instance, the provincial advisers of Nam Tha must consider Nam Tha their own province. I, as adviser of the 408th Battalion, must regard the 408th as [I would] my own unit. A North Vietnamese adviser to a Pathet Lao military or administrative unit is like a helmsman who must guide the boat to its port. The Pathet Lao are like the crew, under the guidance of the helmsman. That is the objective laid down by the [Vietnamese] Lao Dong Party and the Lao People's Party. If anything happens that could damage the friendship and solidarity between Laos and Vietnam, the North Vietnamese advisers must bear the major responsibility, no matter who is right or wrong.

To take an example of a military adviser at work, suppose he had to prepare the battalion for a certain battle. He must possess a thorough knowledge of the Pathet Lao organization. He must get all the information about the enemy's situation, the population, the state of the unit's equipment, food supplies, arms, and ammunition. Then he must devise his military plan. It is up to the political adviser then to consider the objectives of the battle, examine the difficulties, and propose measures. Afterwards the military and political advisers would communicate their plan to the Pathet Lao cadres, who would discuss it and present their own ideas. Then, the Pathet Lao battalion cadres would convoke the cadres of their companies and platoons and inform them of the battle plan. The advisers are allowed to attend the meetings and to present any additional comments and suggestions.

As an example of a political adviser at work, let us suppose that a district adviser wanted the Pathet Lao district cadres to carry out a tax reform. After receiving and studying the documents sent down by the provincial advisers, the district adviser would invite the Pathet Lao district cadre to get acquainted with the regulations and with ways of implementing them at the canton or village level. After the district cadres thoroughly understood the program, they would form teams to go and work in every canton and village. Each team would be accompanied by one adviser, who was constantly at the side of the Pathet Lao cadres to help them correct any mistake and guide them at every step.

Generally speaking, everything is initiated by the North Vietnamese advisers, be it important or unimportant. If the North Vietnamese advisory machinery were to get stuck, the Pathet Lao machinery would be paralyzed. The Pathet Lao leadership relies upon the North Vietnamese advisers; it seldom gives instructions to the lower echelons or tries to find out what is going on among them. The subordinates themselves seldom report to their superiors and show no respect for them. That is the reason why advisers finally have to go into the individual unit to watch over everyone's ideological development, study the results, and make plans.

### Training

[Hap describes here a period when he and other Vietnamese advisers organized a training program for the Pathet Lao units to which they were assigned.]

We prepared for the Pathet Lao units to go into training. At first we gave them one month in which to work on stabilizing the situation among the population. In that time we set up exercise fields and classrooms, and developed instructional materials. The Pathet Lao battalion cadres were entrusted with the responsibility of controlling and supervising the programs. We advisers divided up the task of preparing the teaching materials. We had to base our political and military instruction on the guiding principles handed us from above. For example, our program included [the following topics]:

Political

- o Objectives and tasks of the Laotian revolution.
- o The land of Laos is beautiful and rich, the population of Laos is industrious; why are the Laotian people suffering?
- o Who is the enemy of the Laotian people?
- o The tasks and nature of the Laotian Liberation Army.

Military

- o The education of discipline and self-awakening in the revolutionary army.
- o The methods of troop management by a revolutionary cadre.
- o The capacity and use of various weapons.
- o Instructions on the five great techniques: the use of the bayonet, the use of grenades, shooting a rifle, digging fortifications, and creeping and crawling.

- o Instructions on tactics, operations, attacks, ambushes, hand-to-hand combat, breaching of defense perimeters, etc. . . .

After preparing the instructional materials, we had to teach the Pathet Lao cadres first, so that they in turn could teach the lower levels. We did not teach the Pathet Lao classes directly because we were not fluent in their language.

After we had finished preparing the materials, I, as military adviser to the battalion, had to arrange the programs for every month, week, and day for the whole battalion, and then suggest ways for the Pathet Lao battalion cadres to work. Captain Chinh, the political adviser of the battalion, had to make preparations for such political matters as setting forth the objectives of the training programs and encouraging competition within the battalion so that the troops would study effectively. The training period was divided into three months of political training and two months of military training.

The task of setting up the training program for the Pathet Lao was a great deal more demanding than that of training a North Vietnamese battalion. For the most part, the Pathet Lao lacked discipline. They attended training sessions as their mood prompted them; they would stay away when they didn't feel like coming. The lower cadres were usually of a low cultural level. This was true even of many battalion-level cadres. Their vision was narrow, and they were not used to planning but were prone to handle problems as they came up.

### Morale and Discipline

[Hap described a period when the Royal Lao Government forces that his unit faced increased their strength, which discouraged the local population from helping the Pathet Lao forces and seriously reduced their supplies. In the face of such hardship, the desertion rate increased. In the following, Hap discusses problems of troop morale.]

The men of the 408th showed discouragement, wishing that another unit would replace them. They still accepted their share of duties, since the enemy forces were not numerous in this region. Though we had some encounters with them, they were not fierce. But our men had witnessed many of their friends being wounded and left without proper re. While the cadres and the healthy troops had helped themselves to war booty, the wounded men sometimes did not have anything to wear. I interceded for them, but the battalion commander would not do anything.

Moreover, whenever we won a victory, or whenever the enemy eased his pressure, the Pathet Lao troops became careless. If we met with defeat or faced a difficult situation, they lost their fighting spirit and were discouraged and confused. Their cadres were stirred into action only when there was an operation; otherwise they cared very little about their units. The cadres worked when they liked; when they were depressed, they would do nothing. If their pride was hurt, they would refuse to listen to the adviser.

[Describing another period, when enemy pressure had let up, Hap discusses the problems of discipline he confronted in his Pathet Lao unit.]

The Pathet Lao troops did not equal the North Vietnamese troops -- they felt free to do as they liked.

They had little sense of responsibility and, of ten planned items, carried out at the most only five or six. In transport duty, for instance, they were to make two trips a day, each time carrying 20 kilograms. Sometimes they gave up after one trip, or carried only 10 to 15 kilograms.

When they saw that the enemy was relatively peaceful, they became "subjective" and neglectful. From time to time, they would shoot into the air for no reason at all. Little groups of three to five men would go to the woods to shoot birds or hunt bear. Soldiers showed little respect for discipline; they would get drunk and play around with girls. In fact, the battalion commander himself would take out his gun to fire it in front of girls. Once I criticized him so severely that he became angry and didn't do a thing for a whole day.

Whenever an incident occurred, cadres of the North Vietnamese military unit would whisper to one another, "What are those advisers doing over there? They let their soldiers be so disorderly." One would say, "If I were a Patnet Lao adviser, I would not let them act that way." We advisers were very vexed by this attitude. Some of us replied, "If you wish to be advisers, we will gladly cede our positions. This matter should be brought up before the Military Region Advisers for review, you know."

The Military Region Advisory Group (Ban Co-Van Quan Khu) decided to organize "Ten Days of Vietnamese-Lao Solidarity" (Doan-Ket Viet-Lao). Each Vietnamese Company was to team up with a Lao Company, with Vietnamese and Lao of the same rank instructing one another on how to

deal with troops, work from practical experience, and bring about mutual understanding. Unfortunately, these days of Vietnamese-Lao solidarity were just "painful" days for us in the advisory unit.

#### Counterpart Relations and Control

[Hap describes several incidents which reveal some of the problems he and his colleague, the political adviser of the 408th Battalion, faced in dealing with the Lao Battalion Commander.]

One day I had a quarrel with the battalion commander. The enemy had sent a company to a location controlled by us where we had only one platoon. The platoon requested reinforcement, but we had no reserve troops, since our forces had been spread out. We could not withdraw any unit without leaving several important points unprotected. Finally, we managed to send one platoon to the threatened areas. I suggested that the battalion commander send his deputy along with the platoon, but the commander himself wanted to go also. Since the two platoons already had one company commander, I objected. The reason I had suggested that the deputy commander of the battalion should go was that I wanted him to assess the general situation (not to assume the command of the platoons). If both men were to go, nobody would be left behind to command the unit. They would not listen to me. Finally, over my strong objection, they cancelled the order to send the reinforcement, and no one went. I was enraged. I told them that it was their duty, and if they refused to fight, they would have to account for that to their superiors.

Another time, during a criticism session, the battalion commander asked the political adviser pointblank: "Who is the boss here: we Laotians or you Vietnamese?" This occurred at a time when he was drunk and didn't want to listen to the report of his unit's activities for the day. The political adviser had grown impatient, and his insistence had made the commander angry. After the fit of drunkenness, the Laotian recovered his calm and soon settled matters with the advisers.

[From time to time, both Lao authorities and the Vietnamese advisers at the province level would visit the 408th. Hap describes one of these visits, at a period when the battalion was facing heavy enemy pressure in the region of Muong Sing.]

In early 1966, a delegation of provincial advisers and cadres arrived at our unit. It included the [Vietnamese] provincial senior adviser, Major Canh, and the Pathet Lao provincial delegate (whose name I forget). When the delegation arrived, everyone in the unit, Vietnamese advisers and Pathet Lao cadres, was very much encouraged, because we were about to get help from the higher echelon. The provincial adviser gathered the battalion advisers together to give them encouragement and listen to their reports. He recognized our difficulties, but he encouraged us to persevere and told us: "You must strive to help our friends to hold the unit together. Do not let it disintegrate. Do not let them withdraw from their position without orders from above. Although the population has departed, it is a strategic location, and if the enemy occupies it, Muong Sing will be threatened."



The Pathet Lac provincial cadres assembled the [lower] cadres to review the situation. They then convened the Party members to examine the reasons why the unit had regressed and to review the role of all Party members. Thereafter, the provincial delegate personally went to encourage each company, and the provincial authorities gave the battalion two cows as well as cigarettes as material tokens of their encouragement. After this drive, the unit's condition improved noticeably, and the elements entrusted with patrol, search, and ambush duties proved more eager.

### HIS PERSONAL LIFE

Both administrative and military advisers at the province and district levels live in special quarters, next to the Pathet Lao provincial headquarters. They eat separately from the Pathet Lao. Each adviser is allowed 50 kip\* of spending money per day and also raises poultry and grows vegetables to improve his diet. He is issued 2 uniforms and can buy one additional uniform from the supply service. Such items as sugar, milk, cigarettes, soap, and toothpaste can be bought from the North Vietnamese quartermaster unit in Nam Tha. The adviser can buy items on credit by signing a receipt. The quartermaster sends the receipt to the central office, where the amount is deducted from the man's salary [to be paid out] at home. Each North Vietnamese adviser sent to Laos receives a special pay supplement equal to 50 percent of his base pay.

Advisers attached to battalions and independent companies in the field are in the same situation, but because they must live with the Pathet Lao they must eat like them. Moreover, they are assigned to remote places where it is difficult to send supplies, so that they are somewhat at a disadvantage [compared to those at province and district headquarters]. However, they can save more money.

One just couldn't compare Lao and Vietnamese standards. A Lao was given only 8 kip a day. Moreover, the Vietnamese

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\* Roughly the equivalent of \$0.10 at the present (1968) rate of exchange.

food was cheaper because it came from Vietnamese aid and was priced according to Vietnamese standards. The Lao had nothing and depended on the villagers for their food purchases, and, if the village population fled, they had nowhere to buy food. At times they even shot some of the villagers' buffalos, but they could not do so if the Vietnamese adviser was at their side. As for our advisory unit, since we lived with the Lao and it was wartime, we did not feel right eating separately, and we therefore put in a contribution of 8 kip each and ate with the Lao. This was a hard thing for us to do, but we just closed our eyes and ate the way the Lao did.

[Hap describes a relatively peaceful period for his unit in Muong Sing, from January to September 1965. During that time, his living conditions were adequate.]

The place looked prosperous, with a large population, animated market activities, a clear communications line to China, an adequate supply of food and commodities, and rather low market prices. A chicken cost 150 kip, a fat duck 150 kip, one kilogram of pork 50 kip, and beef 30 kip per kilogram. As there was ample food, my group of Vietnamese advisers could organize their own mess, with each of us contributing only 30 kip per day. From time to time, there was a large festival and we were invited here and there; at the time, the life of a battalion adviser was quite "high class." I had no thought other than to fulfill my task.

[In December 1965, Hap's unit was engaged in dangerous operations. In one battle, his battalion had attacked the enemy, who was firmly emplaced on high ground. The attack failed, and when retreat was ordered, Hap's forces

fled in confusion, leaving behind eight dead. The battalion was demoralized, and Hap was in low spirits.]

I was very much discouraged and pessimistic. I had to endure much hardship: sleeping in the forest, on the ground, in the open, exposed to inclement weather, and eating poor food. I had also failed in my leadership; I had to bear the responsibility for the decline of the battalion. I told myself that it was much too difficult to lead the Pathet Lao -- that they were really poor troops. [Moreover], I was not their direct commander: I had to go through their own cadres for everything, but those cadres were not competent; yet, if anything went wrong, I would be reprimanded by my superior in the advisory mission. In effect, I had great responsibility but no power. The prospect was gloomy indeed. I felt very depressed, and I wished very much that someone would be sent to replace me so that I could return to my country and there go to school or assume other less demanding duties.

The enemy's strength was developing rapidly, his troops were numerous, and the population was now on his side. On our side, there was no substance in our propaganda, only empty words. He said that we were fighting for a just cause, that we had the support of the people. In our unit we had only Lao Teung [highlanders]; no Lao Leum [lowland Lao] were joining the Pathet Lao. How could we say that the people supported us? How could we defeat the enemy? His cannon pounded Muong Nang at regular intervals. His airplanes were constantly flying over our heads. We had to move our camp every two or three days to

escape the bombing. It was really miserable. I could not sleep at night and was obsessed by all kinds of thoughts.

[In January 1966, the military pressure on Hap's unit continued, and his morale was still low.]

It has been a long time since I received a letter from my people, and I did not know why. Tet [the Vietnamese New Year] was drawing near, and all families must be getting ready to welcome the return of spring. My loved ones were surely talking about me; it had been two years since I left them. When would I be allowed to go home? In the present situation, if the enemy attacked, our unit would only flee in disorder. They [the Pathet Lao] might abandon me in their flight, and in that case I would surely die.

#### COMBAT EXPERIENCES

[In the early months of Hap's service in Laos, in 1964, the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion, together with elements of the North Vietnamese 1st Battalion of the 316th Brigade, attacked a Royal Lao Government position. Though Hap was not fully satisfied with their performance, the friendly forces were victorious. Here are some of his recollections.]

As the month of August began, our military unit entered a period of relaxation. We made a general review of what we had learned and prepared ourselves for the Muong Nang operation.

From the period of our recent activities I learned that both Vietnamese and Lao units were inexperienced in fighting regional forces. Since these were local people, they knew all the routes very well. As soon as both sides

entered combat, it did not take [the regional forces] long to disperse, and they were able to regroup immediately. If they were not encircled right away, it was impossible to destroy them. As for the Pathet Lao soldiers, their morale was low; they were poor fighters and poor shots. Sometimes they still fired when there was no enemy present at all. Their cadres were unable to control the soldiers during combat. They could not keep operations secret. All these deficiencies were brought up to educate our troops.

One point had to be noted: The alliance between Lao and Vietnamese troops was very difficult. The Vietnamese did not trust the Lao, and the Lao relied on the Vietnamese, so that coordination in battle was not tight enough to defeat the enemy. The Pathet Lao forces were weak. If they were sent somewhere, a Vietnamese unit had to be sent with them. For example, if one Lao battalion was sent, one Vietnamese company had to go along; if one Lao company was going, one Vietnamese platoon had to accompany it.

[In late 1965, Hap was informed by his superiors at province headquarters that the 408th would soon face attacks by the Royal Lao Government forces. The Vietnamese units which had formerly been stationed nearby had been sent elsewhere, and now the Vietnamese advisers at the company level of the 408th were also to be withdrawn.]

I myself felt very apprehensive, because fighting this time would involve a great deal more hardship than in 1964. The battalion would be fighting by itself, without the support of the Vietnamese troops, without even the close guidance of the upper echelons. Moreover, the

battalion political advisers had just received orders to transfer to another place and were to be replaced. Since the Vietnamese advisers at the company level were also to be withdrawn, this left a single adviser in the whole unit -- myself. Despite the fact that the 408th had undergone a training period and had matured somewhat, I still did not have full confidence in them. Moreover, in the fighting I would have to forget all my sentimental ties [a reference to his future Lao wife]; I would have to start a new life in the open air, in the woods, which, to tell the truth, I did not relish. But then, to whom could I relinquish my responsibility? I had to go, outwardly seeming enthusiastic and courageous to set an example for everyone.

[Hap continues his account of the engagements in late 1965. Though once again Pathet Lao units were successful in pushing out the Royal Lao Government forces in his sector, he was still dissatisfied with the fighting effectiveness of his battalion.]

From all this, I drew the following conclusions: This situation has resulted from the fact that the 408th did not have enough fighting experience, and had had few encounters with enemy planes and artillery. Until recently, they had always been supported by Vietnamese forces. But now that they were by themselves, they did not have the capability to accomplish their mission, and, because their fighting spirit was low, their reconnaissance party was afraid to get close to the enemy. As a result, they were like a blind man walking on a strange road, stumbling and getting hurt at every step, becoming more and more confused, and every now and then losing the will to go on.

I was pessimistic and discouraged myself and very much wanted higher echelons to reinforce us with a Vietnamese company. But this request was in vain. The telegrams sent by the provincial advisory mission offering us their advice were not much help. They only told us that, if we were not in a position to destroy the enemy, we should send reconnaissance parties to find out any weak points in the enemy's defense, and then strike at them; even a small victory would lift the morale of our troops. The provincial advisory mission did send one battalion political adviser and two company political advisers to help me improve the unit's condition. With that reinforcement, the leadership went to each company to work individually with the cadres, and the morale of the troops in general was raised somewhat. We noted fewer absences under pretense of illness.

[In this final selection, Hap describes an engagement that took place in February 1966. The main part of the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion was moved to Muong Long, where the enemy had concentrated its forces to destroy the Pathet Lao base in the Co (a highland tribal minority) area. Hap explains that in this region the Vietnamese and Pathet Lao had built resistance bases against the French, so that the Co people welcomed them heartily, especially after seeing the Vietnamese with the unit. The unit's target was Phieng Luong, the weakest of the enemy's positions although protected with fortifications. With the help of local informants who had access to the post, the Pathet Lao attack succeeded. Hap tells of the plan he devised.]

I discussed the following plan with the Pathet Lao battalion commander:

- Contact the Phieng Luong population and ask them for information about the enemy's position and the terrain;



- send reconnaissance parties and ask the Phieng Luong people to guide them;
- ask the villagers to get food supplies for us; allow the troops to rest and to get ready for the attack;
- within the battalion, convene all members of Party and youth organizations, the cadres of all echelons, and the well-seasoned elements among the troops to acquaint them with the plans and to seek their opinion and ideas;
- encourage the people's organizations to visit with the unit;
- build a sand table reproducing exactly the enemy's post, to familiarize the unit with our attack plan.

After assessing the situation, I devised the following plan. We would use one company of infantrymen. The company would divide into two groups: One would advance to the main gate, while the other would follow to support it. After the battalion cadres had agreed to the plan, the troops were notified. The preparations took about three days. On February 18, 1966, we launched our operation against the Phieng Luong outpost. Our unit was in high spirits and determined to vanquish the enemy.

[Following is the account of the battle.] At 3 a.m. of the 19th, the first group advanced toward the post's gate, and close to the bunker met the sentry. When the sentry flashed his light on us, he was killed instantly by the advance squad, which took possession of the bunker. A second squad followed and stormed into the post, using a B.40 gun to burn a number of buildings. At this moment, the second group joined with the first one. The enemy was caught by surprise. Nevertheless, it took more than two hours of fighting in the trenches

and blockhouses to complete occupation of the post, at 5 a.m. of February 19, 1966. The enemy lost 4 dead, 10 wounded, 2 prisoners; the rest fled. Our side suffered 4 dead and 3 wounded. We captured one 60 mm mortar, one DK 57 gun, one bazooka 90, two submachine guns, a number of rifles, and a quantity of military uniforms and equipment. With this victory, the morale of the battalion got a big lift. Although we had suffered some casualties, this was an exemplary victory.

#### DEFECTION

[Hap went back to Vietnam in July 1966 for a meeting of Vietnamese advisers to Pathet Lao units held at the headquarters of the Northwest Military Region at Son La. On that occasion, he was given home leave. Though he requested reassignment to service in North Vietnam, Hap's orders called for him to return to his post in Nam Tha. As he stated earlier, Hap had by then become quite gloomy about his life in Laos.]

I had to find a way out of this situation. I hated to be sent indefinitely to serve as adviser to the Pathet Lao. In October 1966, therefore, when I returned to Laos, I decided to defect with my present wife, whom I had met in Muong Sing in June 1965 while my unit in Laos was spread out to avoid the enemy bombardment. Our forces were then stationed 2 or 3 kilometers from Muong Sing, and [the members of] our battalion lived with the population in Xieng Me, Tai Xieng Vieng, and Muong Sing. For a whole year before that, we had gone from one operation to another and bivouaced far from the populated areas, and consequently had had little personal life. When we began living with the population, I felt as if my heart had been

warmed. At the time, I was living right next to my future wife's house. Her father was a member of the village council. Therefore, during my spare time, I would visit their house, and during the village council meetings I would contribute opinions as a way of helping local cadres in their work.

Those were the circumstances that brought my wife and me together. From mere acquaintances we soon became secret lovers. Why secret? Because, as a Vietnamese on a mission in Laos, I was not allowed to marry a Laotian or chase after women.\* I was a Vietnamese officer and, if such conduct became known to my superior, I would have to face disciplinary measures.

Earlier, in 1963, my [present] wife had given in to pressure from her family and married a Burmese who had come to Muong Sing to trade. He was quite a lady's man and gambler, and my wife felt no love for him. They lived together for a time, but after she became pregnant he left her for good and took other wives. Also, the Pathet Lao had suspected him of espionage activities. [In the end], the authorities arrested him and handed him over to the Burmese government, and for the next three years there was no news of him. My wife had the right to marry again, but she was reticent about making our love known. For my part, I loved her at the beginning just to have someone

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\* Defectors from the Pathet Lao forces often comment with amazement on the strict discipline that the Vietnamese forces in Laos observe in regard to women.

to love. to change my arid personal life, so that I would not have to face cold loneliness. As the months went by, our love became stronger. I started to realize that time was fleeting and that my return home to North Vietnam was still very much undecided. Moreover, in October 1965 I received orders to go to the front. What would living under the open sky and braving [the enemy's] guns bring me? I thought that, if this went on, I might not see my family [in Vietnam] for a long time.

To add to this, the 408th Pathet Lao Battalion which I was advising was then in bad shape. Its strength was diminishing daily, though the plan for the province called for an increase in force strength. The population was joining the enemy, and they could now attack us from every direction. Besides, we learned that in South Vietnam the war was expanding and nobody could guess when it would end.

While I was back from the front for a mission in Muong Sing for a couple of days, I thought about making the final decision to defect. I shared my sentiment with my future wife, but she dared not decide at that time, for since childhood she had never yet left her family. However, after I had gone back to North Vietnam in July 1966, had been refused reassignment, and had witnessed the ravages of war on that land, it became necessary for me to make a decision. Out of love and pity for my mother and my young children, I did not have the heart to do so at once. Circumstances, however, forced my hand and, much as I was unhappy about it, I had to abandon that part of my life. Consequently, while I was in Vietnam, I collected my salary for my Laos service, which amounted

to 2000 Dong, and bought various things for my mother and children to make it easier for them after I was gone.

By the time I got back to Muong Sing in October 1966, the situation there had changed a great deal. The roads leading to the Chinese frontier, to Muong Nang and Nam Tha, had been ambushed three or four times, including even Xieng Le, the village of my wife's family, where a North Vietnamese platoon was stationed. Nine or ten Vietnamese comrades had been killed or wounded. The people of Muong Sing were quite confused. The North Vietnamese in Muong Sing had only one company left, Company 90 (a transport unit), with about sixty men, and would thus be vulnerable if we tried to defend our Muong Sing position. The Pathet Lao had a little over one platoon, but these were troops of low quality. The enemy's strength started me thinking.

At the time, there was no one in Muong Sing from the Vietnamese provincial advisory committee. Only the commanders of Company 90 were there, and as I was a battalion officer, they had absolutely no authority over me. At 8 a.m., after breakfast, when the unit went into the woods to hide from the planes, I would go to my wife's home. Circumstances allowed us to discuss our plans carefully. At first, my wife was suspicious. She was afraid I might trick her into defecting and then send other cadres after her. She was afraid that the Pathet Lao might ambush and kill us. She was afraid that I might try to kill her on the way.

I did my best to make her understand my views. I told her that I had intimate knowledge of all the plans

of the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese, and that above all the two of us should in no way let a third person in on our plans. Once I had her full agreement, I told her to get in touch with the government forces. Unfortunately, she was too innocent and did not know how to go about it. The result was that we contacted no one. But I decided we should go just the same. We waited until there was a big fair in Muong Sing, when a great many people would be coming into town from the mountains. We could then follow them [unnoticed] when they went back home. When the time came to leave, my wife informed her mother, who agreed readily and said: "You go ahead and find some place to settle. Once you have a place, you can come back and take us with you." We started our escape at 9 a.m. on December 9, 1966.

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10. ABSTRACT <p>An analysis of the North Vietnamese role in Laos. Excerpts are presented from the testimony of Captain Mai Dai Hap, a member of the Communist Lao Dong Party who served as military adviser in northern Laos from February 1964 until his defection in December 1966. As adviser to a Pathet Lao battalion, Captain Hap operated within the framework of the North Vietnamese military and political-administrative support system. Vietnamese political and administrative activities are directed through Group (Doan) 959 at Gia-Lam, about 5 km from Hanoi. The Group receives its instructions from the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party. Purely military matters relating to the insurgency in northern Laos, however, are handled through Northwest Military Region Headquarters at Son La in North Vietnam. Mai Dai Hap's testimony leads to the conclusion that North Vietnamese support for the Pathet Lao forces plays a vital role in their ability to maintain the insurgency against the Royal Lao Government. The Pathet Lao leadership relies heavily on the Vietnamese advisers, who conduct military and political training courses for the Pathet Lao cadres, provide education to Lao technicians, and furnish logistic support. According to Captain Hap, "everything is initiated by the North Vietnamese advisers, be it important or unimportant. If the North Vietnamese advisory machinery were to get stuck, the Pathet Lao machinery would be paralyzed."</p>		11. KEY WORDS <p>LAOS North Vietnam Viet Cong Communism Counterinsurgency and insurgency Military organization Military planning Political Science Government</p>	